

Kohelet (Ecclesiastes)

English version by Len Fellman

sung in English & in Hebrew to the Megillot trope melodies of Portnoy & Wolff 'The Art of Torah Cantillation', using the translations of H.L.Ginsberg, Stone Ed. Tanach, Jerusalem Bible, New King James Bible, and the JPS Tanach (both 1917 & 1999)

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Chapter 1

- 1.1 The words of Kohelet son of David, who was king in Jerusalem.
- 2 “Emptiness upon emptiness”, thus spoke Kohelet. “Vapor of vapors—all is in vain.”
- 3 What profit [is there to a person] [in all his labors] wherein he labors beneath the sun?
- 4 A generation goes and a generation comes. But the earth forever abideth.
- 5 The sun rises and the sun sets. [Then to its place] [it rushes back]. And it comes forth again.
- 6 [The wind goes] [toward the south] [and turns around] [toward the north].
Round and round goes the wind, and in its circling there turns back the wind.
- 7 [All the rivers] run into the sea, yet the sea is never full. [To the place] where the rivers flow, [to that place] once again they flow.
- 8 [All such things] are wearisome. It isn't possible for a man [to speak them].
[No satisfaction] for the eye [to see them]. Not fulfilling for the ear [to hear them].
- 9 [That which has been] is that [which will be], [and that which is done] is what [will be done]. Nothing is new under the sun.
- 10 [Just take] [anything at all] of which they say, “Look here, something new is here.”
Already it happened long ago, in the ages [before our time].
- 11 They are not remembered, [the former ones], so too the latter ones [that are yet to be],
[there won't be] for them remembrance, by those that will be [at a still later time].
- 12 I am Kohelet, and [I was the king] over Israel, in Jerusalem.
- 13 I applied [all my heart] [to seek and] search out, [by means of wisdom], [what pertains to all] that people do under heaven.
[This was indeed] a task [quite grievous to perform], [a task that was given] [to us by God] to the children of man, to labor upon it.
- 14 I saw all the happenings that are done under the sun, and beheld [that all of it] is futile, chasing after the wind.

1:15 What is crooked, one cannot make straight. [Of things that are lacking], they cannot be numbered.
 16 I spoke to myself in my heart, saying: “[I have indeed] beheld [how I have grown richer] and acquired [more wisdom], [than all of those] who ruled before me in Jerusalem, [and my heart] has seen a great deal of wisdom and knowledge.
 17 [And so I set] my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly. [I came to know] that this too is chasing after the wind.
 18 [For indeed] in much wisdom is much grief. [end of chapter melody] He who increases knowledge, increases sorrow.

Chapter 2

2:1 I said to myself in my heart, “[Let me do this]: I will try joy, [and experience pleasure].” And I beheld that this too was vanity.
 2 [As for laughter], I said, “It is mad.” As for merriment, “What does it accomplish?”
 3 I sought in my heart to cheer—with wine—my body,
 [to direct my heart] to guide it with wisdom and to embrace folly, [until I reached the point] | [that I might] [come to understand] what indeed is good for the children of men that they should do under the heavens [in the small number] of days of their lives.
 4 I expanded [the scope of my endeavors], building for myself houses, and planting for me vineyards.
 5 I made myself gardens and orchards, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees.
 6 I made myself pools of water, to irrigate [with them] [the woods full] of growing trees.
 7 I bought male- and [female slaves]. [Home-born servants] I had also.
 [And I had cattle]: herds and flocks in great numbers I possessed, [more than all of those] who were before me in Jerusalem.
 8 I gathered to me both silver and gold, treasures of kings, [as are found in the provinces].
 I acquired for myself both male- [and female singers], [as well as the delights] of the common people, filling my coffers.
 9 Thus I grew, and surpassed [all the other men] who came before me in Jerusalem. And yet did my wisdom yet stand by me.
 10 Whatever [should come along], desired by my eyes, [I did not deny it] [to them]. I held not back from my heart [one single joy], for my heart took delight [in all my labors]. Indeed this was my portion, [from all of my endeavors].
 11 I then [turned my thoughts] to all the achievements wrought by my hands, and the energy I had expended in doing them, and beheld [that it was] [all futile], like chasing the wind. There is nothing of profit under the sun.

2:12 [Then turned] my thoughts to considering wisdom along with madness and folly.

[For indeed], what [can a man do] [who comes along] after the king? Only what has already been done.

13 But I perceived [that there is truly an advantage] to wisdom over folly—

like the advantage that light has over darkness.

14 [The wise man] has his eyes in his head, but the fool—in darkness he walks. But I also realized that the fate is the same that befalls them both.

15 I said to myself [in my heart], “The fate of the fool is to me also destined.

[So what makes] [the wisdom I possess], for me then, an advantage?” And I said in my heart [that this too] is futile.

16 [Because in fact] [there is no] remembrance [for the wise man] [any more than for the fool]—forever,

[in that what already is] in the days to come will all be forgotten. [For indeed] the wise man dies just like the fool].

17 [And thus I hated] life itself, for grievous to me was everything that is done under the sun; it is all futile, like chasing the wind.

18 I hated as well [all of my labors] in which I had toiled under the sun, For I [must leave it] to a man who will come after me.

19 And who [can know] [if a wise one] he will be, or a fool?

He will rule [over all the wealth] in which I toiled and applied wisdom under the sun. This too is futile.

20 It came to this: that I despaired in my heart regarding all of the labor [in which I had toiled] under the sun.

21 [So it is] [that a man] [who has labored] with wisdom and with knowledge and with skill,

[to another man] [who has not toiled] [for it], [leave to him] as his portion. This too is futile, chasing after the wind.

22 [For indeed], what has a man [for all of his labor], and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun?

23 [And in fact], [all his days] [are truly full of pain], and grievous are his tasks. Even nighttime gives no rest to his heart. This too is all futile.

24 [Is it not good for a man just to eat and to drink, [and to show] [to his soul] satisfaction in his labors?

This too was seen by me [to be one of those things] that from the hand of God is given.

25 [For indeed] [who is it]—[who can truly eat] or feel enjoyment other than myself?

26 For to a man who is good in His sight, [God on him bestows] wisdom and shrewdness [to enjoy himself]. [But to him who goes astray]

He gives the task of gathering [and of storing up], [that he may give it over] [to one who is good] in the sight of God.

[end of chapter melody] This too is futile; a pursuit of the wind.

Chapter 3

3:1 To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose, under heaven.

2 A time to be born, and a time to die. A time for planting, and a time for uprooting the planted.

3 A time for killing and a time for healing. A time to break down and a time to build up.

4 A time for weeping and a time for laughing. A time for mourning and a time for dancing.

5 [A time] [to be throwing] stones, and a time to be gathering stones. A time to embrace, and a time for shunning embraces.

6 A time for seeking and a time for losing. A time for keeping and a time for discarding.

7 A time for tearing and a time for sewing. A time for silence and a time for speaking.

8 A time for loving and a time for hating. A time for war, and a time for peace.

9 Now what profit [has the worker] from that in which he does toil?

10 I observed [the assigned task] that [has been given] [to men by God]—to the sons of man, to occupy themselves with.

11 All things did God make beautiful in their time. And also eternity He placed in their hearts, [and yet He hides from them], [in such a way] as to prevent [there being found by man] [what really is the work] being done by God, from beginning to end.

12 [I then realized] [that in truth] nothing is so good for them than to be joyful, and to do what is good in their lifetime.

13 And also each person who eats and drinks should see the good in all his labor—that a gift from God [truly it is].

14 [And I realized] [that whatever has occurred]—[that which] has been done by God: this will endure forever.

To it nothing can be added, [and from it] [nothing taken] away. God has done it [that they be in awe] [before Him].

15 That which is has already been. That which shall be already happened. [And yet does God] care for the persecuted.

16 And more did I notice under the sun: In the place of justice [there is found] wickedness. In the place of righteousness, there is found evil.

17 Then said I in my heart, “Both the righteous and the wicked will be judged by God.

[He has set a time] for every purpose [and for all that takes place] on the earth.”

18 And again I said in my heart as concerns the children of man, [that they are tested] by God,

[so that it may be seen] that they can as beasts behave.

19 [For as it concerns] the fate of the sons of man and the fate [of the beasts], [there is a single] fate [for both of them].

As dies the one, so dies [the other one]. The same life-breath have they both. The superiority of man over the beast is false. It all is but vanity.

3:20 They all go to the same place. They all come from dust, and they all return to the dust.

21 And [who can know] [the spirit] of the sons of man, whether it rises upwards,
or the spirit of the beast, whether it descends down into the earth?

22 [And so I perceived] that [there is nothing] better than that man rejoices in his endeavors, for this is his portion.
And who [can bring him] to see [end of chapter melody] [what will happen] after his time?

Chapter 4

4:1 Further [I went on] to consider [all the oppression] that goes on under the sun: [Take for example] [the tears [of the oppressed],
[and no one there] for them [to offer comfort]. In the hand of their oppressors is the power, but there is for them no protector.

2 [Therefore I praised]—[I thought them more well-off]—the dead, [who are already] gone,
than the living, [they who are the ones] that must live yet longer.

3 [Better off] than both are those as yet not yet alive, [who have not] seen the acts of evil that are committed under the sun.

4 And I came to see [all of the hard work] [as well as] all excellence in work, [that the source of it] is the rivalry of man with his neighbor.
[This too is vanity and pursuit of wind.

5 The fool just folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.

6 [Better to be sure] to fill one's hand with quietness [than to fill] [both of one's hands] with labor and vexation of spirit.

7 [And I continued] [thus to contemplate] observing all the vanity under the sun.

8 Consider [someone living alone] who has no company. Neither [has he a son] nor a brother [does he have]. [But there is no] end to his toil.
[Nor are his eyes] ever satisfied with riches. [For whom—he might ask] —am I [working so hard], and denying to myself what is good?
[This too] [is but vanity]. A sorry business it is.

9 Better off are two [than one who works alone], [because they can be sure] [that they will receive] a good reward for their labor.

10 [For if] [they should fall], the one [can lift up] his companion.

[But alas for him] [who does] [fall down], and there is no one else [to help him up].

11 [And another thing], if two sleep together, [it is warm] for them, [but one alone]—how will he be warmed?

12 [One might overpower] [a single man], [but two together] [will stand up] [to him]. A cord [made of three-ply thread] is not readily broken.

4:13 [Better is a youth]—a lad who is poor, but wise
 than a king who is old but foolish, [who in truth does not] know how to heed warnings, any longer.
 14 The former from a prison emerged as the king, [although it be the truth] that in his own kingdom he was born as a pauper.
 15 [I perceive though] that all of the living, [all those who walk] under the sun,
 [that they sided] with the youth—[the second one], the one who will stand in his place.
 16 There is no end [to the number of people], [all to whom] [he stood as king] [before them].
 Yet they that come after will not acclaim him. This is vanity, chasing after the wind.
 17 Guard [carefully your steps] [when you would] walk to the house of God, [Better draw near] and hearken,
 than be like the fools, with their offerings, [end of chapter melody] It is not known to them, that they are doing evil.

Chapter 5

5:1 Do not be rash with your mouth, [and let not your heart] [act hastily] to utter a word, in the presence of God,
 since [God is in] heaven and you are on earth. [And therefore] let your words be few.
 2 [In a like manner] as comes a dream, due to much activity, so does talk that is foolish, come from much speaking.
 3 [When it happens] that you should make a vow—[you make a vow to God], [do not delay] [to carry it out],
 [for indeed] God takes no pleasure in fools. Whatever you have vowed, [carry it out].
 4 [It is better] [not to make] a vow, [than to make a vow] and fail to fulfill it.
 5 [Do not let] your mouth bring guilt on your flesh, [and do not declare] before God's messenger that in error you spoke.
 [Why indeed] [should you anger] God by your talk, and destroy the work of your hands.
 6 [For it is] [that in the multitude] of dreams there is vanity, [as too in a surfeit] of talk. Rather hold God in awe.
 7 If the oppression [of the poor] or violation of justice and righteousness you should see in the state, [do not be surprised] at the matter.
 For [one high official] over [another official] is watching, [and higher officials] [watch over him].
 8 The profit from the land is for all to receive. Even the king, to the land is indebted.
 9 A lover of money is not satisfied with money, nor the lover of wealth with his income. This too is vanity.
 10 With the increase of his goods, [they increase] who consume them. What advantage has its owner, except to see them with his eyes.

5:11 Sweet is the sleep of the laborer, whether he has little or much to eat,
but the abundance [of the rich man] [does not in the least] permit him to sleep.

12 [There is] an evil quite disgusting that I have seen under the sun: [namely that of riches] that are kept by their owner, [to his own detriment].

13 [When they are lost]—these riches—through a venture ill-conceived, he may bear a son but in his hand he has nothing.

14 [Just as] he came from the womb of his mother, naked shall he return, going out [as he came in].
Nothing shall he take from his labor [that he may carry away] in his hand.

15 Also this is an evil [to disgust one]: just as he came in, so will he depart; [so what profit] [does he have] that he labors for the wind?

16 Besides, all his days in darkness does he eat, worrying greatly in sickness and resentment.

17 [Thus I did conclude]—this [was understood by me]: [best it is] and fitting [for a man to eat] [and as well to drink]
[and to enjoy the good things] [he gains from all work] [wherein he labors] [underneath the sun]
[in the small number] [of days of his life] that were given him by God, for this is his portion.

18 Indeed [unto every man] to whom was given—[given to him by God] riches and property,
[to whom God gave power] to eat thereof, to partake of his portion and be happy in his work—[let him know this]: a gift from God, it all is.

19 For not unduly will he dwell [on the few days] of his life, [because of the fact]
[that God keeps him busy], [end of chapter melody] [and provides him] with joy in his heart.

Chapter 6

6:1 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun. A grave one it is for man.

2 A man to whom [is given to him]—[granted to him by God]—[abundant riches], [as well as property and honor], [so that there is not]
a lack—[a need within his soul] [of all] [that he might have desire], [but he has not the means] from God to [partake of it],
[because it happens that] another man—a stranger—enjoys it. This [indeed is vanity]. A grievous ill it is.

3 [If he should have]—a man—[even one hundred children], [and if his years] are many in his lifetime; [if great they are] |
indeed, [each living day of his years], but his soul [is not content] [with the good things], if even burial [is not given] to him,
[this is what I then say]: better off than he is a stillbirth.

4 For futile is its coming and in darkness it departs. In darkness its very name is enveloped.

6:5 Though the sun he has not seen, nor anything known, *naches* (fulfillment) has the latter [more than the former],
 6 even [if the man had lived] a thousand years [or twice that], but goodness never saw. [For is it not the case], that to one place, do both return.
 7 All the toil of a man [is but for his mouth], yet his soul is not fulfilled.
 8 [For indeed], what advantage has the wise man over the fool? [What of the poor man] [who knows how] to walk through life?
 9 [Better too it is] the sight of the eyes [than the wandering of the soul]. Even this is vanity, and pursuit of wind.
 10 [Whatsoever happens], already has been given a name. It is known that he is but a man. He cannot contend with one stronger than he.
 11 [True indeed it is]: things in excess produce more futility. [What then is best] for a man?
 12 For [who can know] what is good for a man [in his life], [in those few days] that he lives so vainly, passing like a shadow?
 And too, who can tell a man [end of chapter melody] what will take place after him, under the sun?

Chapter 7

7:1 Better a good name than oil that is fine. Better [the day of death] than the day of birth.
 2 [Better it is] to go [to a house of mourning] than to go to a house of feasting, [by virtue of the fact] that *this* is the end for all people.
 The living should take it to heart.
 3 Better feel grief than laughter. Indeed a sad face leads to gladness of heart.
 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; The heart of the fool in the house of laughing.
 5 [It is surely better] to listen to the rebuke of a wise man, [than that a person] should listen to the song of a fool.
 6 For like the crackling of thorns under a kettle is the laughter of fools. This too is vanity.
 7 And oppression makes a fool of the wise man. Debased is the heart by a gift.
 8 [Better it will be]—the end of a matter than is the beginning. Better a patient spirit than a haughty one.
 9 Don't hasten in your spirit to get angry. Indeed anger—in the bosom of fools abides.
 10 [Do not ask,] "How [is it] that the days of old were better days than these?"
 [Because in fact] not prompted by wisdom, do such questions come.
 11 Good is wisdom as a legacy, of great profit for those beholding the sun.
 12 [For it might be said], the shelter of wisdom is like the shelter of money. What advantage is knowledge? Wisdom imparts life to its owner.

7:13 [Observe then] the workings of God: For [who is it] that can [make straight again] that which God has made crooked?
 14 In the day of good fortune dwell in the good, in the day of misfortune, consider: both the former and the latter were brought forth by God, [in order that] [there be not] [found in God] [when asked by a man] [afterwards] any fault.
 15 All this have I seen in my days that are fleeting: [There is the] *tzaddik* (the righteous man) who dies in his goodness, [and there is the] *rasha* (the evil man) who endures [through his evil].
 16 [Do not be] a *tzaddik* excessively. [Do not play the wise one] too much. [Why should you] be left desolate?
 17 Do not play the *rasha* to excess—yes be not a fool. Why should you die before your time?
 18 Best it is that you grasp the one, [but of the other] don't let go your hand. The one who fears God does his duty through both things.
 19 Wisdom [gives more strength] to the wise [than do ten] rulers that are to be found in the city.
 20 For [among men] there is none who is righteous on earth—one who does only good and does not stray.
 21 Also, [to all of the words] that people say, do not take them to heart, [in order that you] do not hear your servant revile you.
 22 [For indeed] there have been many times—this you know in your heart—you have yourself reviled others.
 23 All this I have tested with wisdom. I thought [I could become wise], but it was beyond me.
 24 [Elusive indeed], [is that which occurs]. It is so very deep, who can fathom it?
 25 [So I turned about], [and I applied] my mind to study and search out, to look for wisdom and for reasons, to know wickedness and stupidity, foolishness and madness.
 26 What was also clear to me: bitter [even more than death] is a woman: [the one who is] [made of all snares]: [and a hunting net] is her heart; fetters are her hands. [A man who is good] [—who stands] before God eludes her, [but the sinful man] is caught by her.
 27 See! This [is what I found]—thus speaks Kohelet—item by item in my search for reasons.
 28 [As for all these things], further sought my soul, but it could not find.
 [If there was a man], it was one in a thousand I found. A woman among these did I *not* find.
 29 But see that this [I *did* find]: [I came to know] [that when man was made] [—when God made] [the human being] [God made him simple], [end of chapter melody] but they have sought to make accounts—to reason unduly.

Chapter 8

8:1 Who is like [a wise man], and who knows the interpretation of things?

The wisdom of a man brightens his face; the sternness of his face is transformed.

2[I say] [that the king's command] [should be kept], [this you should do] for the sake of your oath to God.

3 [Do not be in haste] [to leave the presence] of the king; [don't take a stand] using words speaking evil, [for indeed], whatever he wants, he can do:

4 Since the word of the king has authority. Who can say to him, "[What are you doing?]"

5 He who keeps his command will not know a word of evil. Both time and justice are known by the heart of wisdom.

6 And for each experience there are both time and justice. For, the evil of man weighs heavily upon him.

7 For no one can know [that which will be]. [At the moment] that a thing is to happen, [who is there] that could tell him about it?

8 Nor [is there for a man] power over the wind, to hold back the wind, [nor has he] power over the day of death.

[There is no discharge] from that war. [No deliverance by wickedness] [for the possessor thereof].

9 [All this] have I seen, and applied my heart [to observe every deed] that is done under the sun.

[Knowing the times] in which [there does rule] [one man] over another, to do harm to him.

10 [And along with all this], [here is what I have seen]: wicked men brought to burial. [They had often come]

to the *makom kadosh* (the holy place) and profaned it. But forgotten in the city were those [who did righteously]. This too is vanity,

11 In that [they do not carry out] the sentence for acts of wrongdoing promptly. [And this provides the reason]

[why so fully set] [are the hearts] [of the sons of men] [within them] to do evil.

12 [If there be] [a sinful man] who does [an evil deed] [a hundred times], and prolonged are his days,

[even so] it is known by me [that it will] be well [for those who fear] God, [for those who have awe] in God's presence.

13 But well it shall *not* be [for the wicked man] nor shall he prolong his days,

[that are like a shadow], [owing to the fact] that he has no fear in the presence of God.

14 [Here is a vain thing], that [takes place] on the earth: [it can happen that] there are [righteous men] of whom [it is required] them for the deeds of the wicked, [and there are] [wicked men] of whom it is required them for the deeds of the righteous. [To this I say], it is all vanity.

8:15 [Therefore praised] by me was *simchah* (enjoyment), since there [is nothing better] for a man under the sun than to eat and to drink, and be merry. [These things will indeed] attend him [in his labor] [through the days] [of his life] that are granted him by God, under the sun.
 16 [When I] applied my heart to [know wisdom], and to observe all the business that goes on in the world—
 [for just as] by day, [it happens by night], [that in fact slumber] by my eyes are not seen.
 17 [And I perceived] [all the workings] of God: [that indeed] it is not possible [for a man] to fathom the events, the acts, that are done [under the sun] [for the reason that] although [he labors]—[a man struggles hard]—[to seek it out], he fails [to find them out]. Even if it be claimed by a sage [that he knows it], [end of chapter melody] even he will not be able, [to find out what it means].

Chapter 9

9:1 And [for all these things], [I laid it up] in my heart, [thus to make clear] all this:
 [that in fact] [even righteous men], [people who are wise]—their works are in the hands of God.
 [Whether there be love], [or whether there be hate], [it is not] known by man. [All of their causes] precede him.
 2 [All things indeed], alike [to everyone], their fate is one: to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good, to the clean and to the unclean, [to those who offer sacrifice] [and to those who do not] offer sacrifice.
 As to the good, so to the sinner; [to him who swears an oath] [as to him] who fears an oath.
 3 [Thus it truly is] [an evil there is indeed] in all that is done under the sun: there is but one fate for everyone. [This is why] the heart [of the sons of men] [is full of malice]. There is madness in their hearts [while they do live], [after which] [they go to the dead].
 4 For him who would be joined to all the living there is indeed hope: A dog that is alive [is surely better off] than a lion that is dead.
 5 [For at least], [those who are alive] know [that they will die]. [But as for the dead], [they surely do not] know [anything at all].
 [There is not left] to them any recompense, because forgotten, is their memory.
 6 Also [their loves], [and as well their hatreds], and their jealousies have already perished.
 [Indeed a portion] [they no longer] have on the earth, in that which is done, under the sun.
 7 Go and eat with joy your bread. Drink with a glad heart your wine. Because already approved by God are your deeds.
 8 [And so at all times] let your clothes be white. May oil on your head not be lacking.

9:9 And spend your life with the wife [that you love], all the days of your life that is fleeting, [that God gave] to you under the sun, all your days of futility, [for indeed] this is your portion in life, and in your labor in which you toil, under the sun.

10 [Whatever work] [there may be] [that is found] [by your hand] doing which—is within your powers; do it. [Because indeed] [there is no] doing, or planning, learning or wisdom [in the grave—in Sheol], the place to which you are going.

11 [I came back to this]: I saw that [under the sun], [it is not the case] that to the swift goes the race, [nor is it the case] that to [the valiant goes the battle], not to the wise goes the bread, [nor is it true] [that to the] intelligent go the riches, [and as is also true], not just to the learned comes favor. For a time of mischance, comes to all.

12 [Since this it is that we do know]—[this indeed is true]: It is not known by man [when his time will come]. Just as fish that are caught in a net that is treacherous; [just as the birds] are trapped in a snare, [in the same way], are entrapped the children of men in the day of misfortune [when it comes upon them] without warning.

13 [And something else]: I have seen this wisdom under the sun. Great did this seem to me:

14 There was a small city. The people inside it were few. [One day there came upon it] a king—[a great king]—who proceeded to surround it, and built up against it, great siegeworks.

15 There was found [inside the town] a man who was poor but wise. And he saved the city with his wisdom. But people did not remember this man—this poor man—afterward.

16 Thus was noted by me: Better is wisdom than valor. The wisdom [of a poor man] is scorned. His words are not heeded.

17 The words of the wise spoken quietly are heard more than the cry of a king, over fools.

18 Better is wisdom than weapons of war. But one mistake [end of chapter melody] [can indeed bring to ruin] much that is good.

Chapter 10

10:1 Dead flies make putrid and fetid the oil of the perfumer. [Thus is outweighed] wisdom and honor by a bit of folly.

2 The heart [of a wise man] [leads him toward the right]; the heart of a fool toward the left.

3 [Even on the road], when the fool is walking, his mind is not present. Thus he announces to everyone, what a fool he is.

4 If the spirit of the ruler rises up [against you], from your place [you should not budge], since maintaining composure eases grave offences.

5 There is a great evil that I have seen under the sun. [It appears as an error] proceeding from a ruler:

10:6 Placed is folly on heights greatly esteemed, [while men of wealth] the low places are taking.
 7 I have seen servants riding on horses, [while noblemen] are walking like servants on the ground.
 8 Upon digging a pit, inside it one falls. After breaching a wall, one is bitten by a snake.
 9 [He who quarries] stones will be hurt therewith. [He who splits wood] is endangered thereby.
 10 If blunt [should be an ax]—if one its edge has not honed—more strength must one exert. The advantage that brings success is wisdom.
 11 If the snake bites [before the snake-charmer acts], it brings no advantage to have [a master charmer].
 12 Words from the lips of a wise man bring favor, but the lips of a fool bring ruin.
 13 In the beginning the words from his lips are foolishness, but the conclusion [of his talk] is madness altogether.
 14 The fool multiplies words. Not known by a man is what is to be. As to what [will take place] [after him], who could advise him?
 15 The exertions of a fool [wear him out], until he does not know how to get to a town.
 16 [Woe to you] O land whose king is a child, and whose ministers in the morning are feasting.
 17 But blessed is the land whose king is nobly born, whose ministers [at the proper time] do dine, with restraint and not through drunkenness.
 18 Through laziness [appears a sag] in the ceiling. Through slackened hands, appears a leak in the house.
 19 For revelry they make a banquet. With wine they bring gladness to life. But money answers all needs.
 20 Even [in your thoughts], a king [do not revile]. Even while in your bedroom [do not curse] the rich.
 For a bird of the air may carry your voice. [end of chapter melody] A creature with wings will broadcast your words.

Chapter 11

11:1 Cast your bread on the face of the waters, since after many days [you will find it].
 2 Give a portion to seven, or even to eight. Indeed, you do not know what evil will occur on the earth.
 3 If filled are the clouds with rain, on the earth they will pour down. If [there should fall a tree] to the south or to the north, [in that very place] that falls the tree, there it shall lie.
 4 One who watches the wind will never sow. One who stares at the clouds, will never reap.
 5 [Just as you] [do surely not] know the way of the wind, or how the bones [grow in the womb] [of a pregnant woman], [in the same way] [you cannot] know the workings of God, the One who makes it all happen.

11:6 In the morning sow your seed; in the evening do not hold back your hand.

[For indeed], you surely do not know which act will succeed, the one or the other, or if the two are equally good.

7 Sweet is the light. It is good to the eyes to see the sun.

8 [For in fact] if the years [are many in number] in the life of a man, [let him all of them] enjoy:

Let him remember the days of darkness, of which many there will be. Yet it all will be fleeting.

9 Rejoice, [young man], [in your youthful years]. Make glad your heart in the days of your childhood, And walk in the path of your heart and in the sight of your eyes. [But this you must know]: [that in fact] [for all these things], you will be brought by God to judgment.

10 [Do away with] vexation [from your heart], and put away evil from your flesh.

[end of chapter melody] For childhood and all the black hair of youth—[all will be fleeting].

Chapter 12

12:1 So remember your creator in the days of your youth until a time should come, that the days are difficult, and the years arrive in which you say, “There is nothing in them for me that gives pleasure.”

2 [While the time is still here] in which not darkened is the sun and the light, nor the moon and the stars, when not yet return the clouds after the rain.

3 [In the day] [when the arms tremble]: “the keepers of the house”; [when the legs stoop]: “The men of valor”; when ceases [the grinding mill] (the teeth) since [the grinders are few], and grown dim are those that gaze through the windows (the eyes).

4 And closed are the doors to the street (the ears), [when one rises up] at the sound of a bird, [and brought low] are all the daughters of song.

5 And when heights cause one fear, as does terror on the road; when blossoms [the almond tree] [and heavy with food] is the grasshopper, [and again there buds] [the caper bush] [while sets out] a man for his home everlasting, and going about in the streets, are mourners.

6 [Do it] before is snapped the cord of silver and is shattered the bowl made of gold, and is broken the jug at the spring, and crushed is the wheel at the well.

7 [Then all will return]—[as dust, it returns]—[into the earth], [as once it emerged], and the lifebreath returns unto God, the One who bestowed it.

8 [Futile it all is], [and emptiness]. Thus speaks Kohelet: all of it is futile.

12:9 [And one further word]: Because Kohelet was a sage, continually [he taught knowledge] to the people.
He pondered [and sought out] [and arranged] proverbs in great numbers.

10 And sought Kohelet to discover [words of delight], and recorded straightforwardly, words of truth.

11 The saying of the wise are like spurs—like nails implanted—by the masters assembled,
[all transmitted] by the *ro'eh echad*: [the one shepherd].

12 And furthermore, of these things, [my son, do give] heed:

Of writing books in great numbers, there is no end. To study excessively, makes weary the body.

13 The end of the matter, with all said and done:

God should be feared, and His commandments observed: [for this it is] [that makes the whole man].

14 Since [all of the deeds], [God Himself] will bring to judgment, even all that is hidden,

[end of chapter melody if not repeating 13] [whether it be of good], [or whether of evil].

13 *repeated* The end of the matter, with all said and done: God should be feared, and His commandments observed:

[end of chapter melody] [for this it is] [that makes the whole man].

Len Fellman's English readings with tropes

The purpose of this project is to translate *THE SONG OF THE TORAH* into English.

I work by comparing as many as ten English translations of a *pasuk* and creating a cantillated English sentence that sounds as much as possible like the Hebrew. They follow the Hebrew as closely as possible, word for word and trope by trope. The English language has an amazing flexibility, making it possible to make the English word order match that of the Hebrew quite well, allowing for some “poetic licence”, and some willingness on the part of the listener to be “carried” by the melody more than by the English syntax. The translation needs to sound good when *chanted*, but not necessarily when *spoken or read*.

Unlike most translations, these “transtropilations” are not intended to be a substitute for the Hebrew. On the contrary, they are meant to provide a “window” into the Hebrew text and its musical expression. My ideal listener knows enough Hebrew and has enough interest to follow the Hebrew in a bilingual text while the *leyner* is chanting the English version, to bring the Hebrew text to life, both *verbally* and *musically*. For this purpose I use *exactly* the same tropes in the English as in the Hebrew (almost always on the corresponding English word).

The texts can be used to do **consecutive translation**, i.e. leyning a phrase in Hebrew, followed by the corresponding phrase sung in English. Some of my recordings demonstrate this. I do this frequently when leyning for groups that either know little Hebrew, or that don't have a *chumash* in front of them.

I favor literal translations (e.g. “cut a covenant”) to call attention to Hebrew idioms, and towards simpler (even if less accurate) words (e.g. Ex. 12:7 “beam above the door” rather than “lintel”) to be easier to follow. If my readings provoke a discussion of the Hebrew, I consider that as justification for using less-than-idiomatic English. I try to find just the right balance between “literalness” and “listenable-ness”. A primary goal is throwing light on the Hebrew syntax.

In order to adapt the trope symbols to a left-to-right language like English, I *reversed* the direction of the trope symbols:

mercha tipcha munach tevir mapakh or yetiv kadma or pashta gersh gershayim telisha katana telisha gedola

(Generally speaking the *conjunctive tropes* such as mercha, munach, mapakh, kadma, and telisha katana “lean toward” the words they “conjoin” to, while the *disjunctive tropes* such as tipcha, gersh, gershayim, and telisha gedola “lean away” from the words that follow, so as to create a sense of separation.)

The trope symbol is normally placed under the accented syllable, unless it is a *pre-positive* accent (telisha gedola, placed *at the beginning* of the word or phrase) or a *post-positive* one (telisha katana or pashta, placed at the *end* of the word or phrase).

The Hebrew text frequently puts a *makkeph* (which is like a hyphen) between words in order to treat them as a single word to be chanted. I use a different system for English: If an entire English phrase is to be chanted to a single trope melody, I place it between grey brackets, as in this phrase from the Book of Lamentations:

[clings to her skirts]

The *leyner* is invited to fit this phrase to the *Eicha* “rivi'i” melody in whatever way seems most natural.

As a variant of the “grey bracket” device, I indicate pairs of tropes by “wrapping them around” the phrase which have the combined melody:

mercha/tipcha	kadma/geresh (or: azla, etc.)	mercha siluk
(Renew our days)	(She weeps bitterly).	(a fire-offering to God)

Again, the *leyner* should decide on the most natural way to fit the phrase to the combined trope melody.

I put words in gray which I consider essential but which don’t strictly match the Hebrew. I also “pad” some phrases with extra words in gray to fill out a musical phrase nicely. Different trope systems vary widely in the length of the musical phrase used, so the words in gray may or not be used depending on the *leyner*’s cantillation system. In particular, the tropes *telisha g’dola* (ר), *legarmeh*, *metigah-zakef*, and *pazer* vary widely in the musical phrases used for chanting. (And please indulge me in my whimsical treatments of *shalshelet*.)

“*Metigah-zakef*” is a special trope combination which can be recognized by a kadma and a zakef katon appearing on the same Hebrew word (again, a *makkeph* makes two words into one). (There are several examples in Genesis 18 & 19, beginning with 18:16). I indicate this by placing the corresponding English phrase in grey brackets:

[Take heed—take care for yourself]

In some trope systems (viz. cantor Moshe Haschel in “Navigating the Bible II”) this is given a distinctive melody—I add extra syllables to fill out the musical phrase (as in “take care” in this example). Haschel’s system also chants the trope *munach* as *legarmeh* more often than other systems do.

I don’t write a single word of translation without first hearing the melody of the phrase in my mind, following one of two trope systems: The one by Portnoy and Wolff (*The Art of Cantillation*) or the one by Joshua R. Jacobson (*Chanting the Hebrew Bible*).

I transcribe the name יהוה as YHWH (in small caps). I almost always chant this as *yud-hey-vav-hey*, which I have discovered fits marvelously into several of the trope melodies. But of course the *leyner* can choose to pronounce it as “God” or “Adonai”.

Warning on the Hebrew text: The text I use for the English trope system is from Aryeh Kaplan; the Hebrew text I display is from Wikisource. Occasionally (but rarely) a phrase will use different tropes in the two systems.

The English translations I mostly use (besides several scholarly commentaries) are the following:

Aryeh Kaplan, ‘The Living Torah’ (1981) (also my source for proper names & transliterations)
Richard Elliott Friedman, ‘The Bible With Sources Revealed’ (2003)
Everett Fox, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (1997)
The Stone Edition ‘Tanach’ (1996)
JPS ‘Hebrew-English Tanach’, (2nd Ed. 2000), *along with* Orlinsky, ‘Notes on the New Translation of the Torah’ (1969)
Robert Alter, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (2004)
Commentaries in the ‘Anchor Bible’ series
Rotherham, The Emphasized Bible (1902)
The Jerusalem Bible (1966) (also my source for topic headings)
The New King James Bible (1982)